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**An Earls Land Lease Revisited: Notes on the 8th-century charter
sometimes referred to as The Bibury Charter with an alternative
suggestion regarding its Bounds**

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An earl's lease-land revisited: Notes on the 8th-century charter sometimes referred to as 'The Bibury Charter' with an alternative suggestion regarding its Bounds

by PATRICK MANSELL

PART I: INTRODUCTION TO THE 'BIBURY CHARTER' (SAWYER 1254)

The opening of a new gallery at the Corinium Museum in Cirencester to display finds from the pagan Saxon cemetery at nearby Lechlade provides a convenient moment to reconsider an early charter relating to the stretch of countryside around the nearby village of Bibury.

The Latin text of the charter S. 1254 relates a rather charming tale. Bishop Wilfrid of Worcester leases to Earl Leppa five cassati from a church estate of 15 cassati 'on account of our old friendship' (*propter veterem inter nos amicitiam*). This gift is for the Earl's lifetime and that of his daughter, Beage (*filiae suae quae vocatur Beage*). The land then reverts to the diocese. A heading usually transferred to the printed text is '*beagen byrig*' – apparently the enclosure of Beage – and the daughter's name is said to be preserved in the village name of Bibury.¹

The charter is dated to *c.* AD 721 × 743. In his survey *The Early Charters of Gloucestershire* H.P.R. Finberg placed the document in his category 'available only in a later copy or copies; authenticity not in doubt.'² This is a judgment broadly accepted. The document is said to be the earliest surviving English lease and there are in addition Old English bounds of the lease-grant inserted into the Latin text.³ This article attempts a re-assessment of previous efforts to determine these bounds, using both the Old English text with its waymarks and a consideration of the actual landscape.

The original document concerned is in the British Museum manuscript *Cotton MS Tiberius A xiii* which contains two manuscripts bound together. The first of these was compiled in the early years of the 11th century and has sometimes been called the *Liber Wigorniensis* or *Worcester 'landbok'*. This is a great collection of the charters of the Saxon Abbey of St Peter (later St Mary) at Worcester. Only once to date has this been published in full, by Thomas Hearne in 1723 as '*Hemingi Cartularium*' (the title taken from the name of the monk Heming, the self-proclaimed author of the second and late 11th century part of the Cotton manuscript).

After Hearne's publication of the Worcester manuscript various other selections of Anglo-Saxon Charters, including charters from Worcester, have been published. Each editor made his own choice of documents and numbered them according to his own scheme. Individual charters are referenced in subsequent commentaries by letters (notably 'K' for Kemble or 'B' for Birch) taken from the initial letter of editor's surname followed by their number in his edition. In 1968 another compilation was published by Prof. P.H. Sawyer with the 'S' initial and a new numbering. This

1 *The Place-Names of Gloucestershire* by E.H. Smith (Cambridge, 1965), part I, p. 26.

2 H.P.R. Finberg, *The Early Charters of Gloucestershire* (Leicester University Press, Leicester, 1961).

3 F. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 3rd edn., 1971), p. 485.

compilation was subsequently placed on the internet. Regardless of numbering schemes, in all these selections individual charters were separated from those other charters copied immediately beside them in the original manuscripts. This separation is usually unimportant. However, in the case of the 'Bibury Charter' from Worcester Abbey this loss of context has – so this article will argue – crucially misdirected previous efforts to identify waymarks and hence define the land-area described in the bounds.⁴

The most influential analysis of the charter is still that found in G.B. Grundy's 'Saxon charters and field names of Gloucestershire' (Council of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society, 1935). At the very outset Grundy finds fault with the transmission of the text. He writes: 'It is fairly certain that the earlier part of the body of the grant has been omitted from the extant document. The document itself, at any rate as it is printed, is a bad copy of a Saxon original. It contains errors which render it hardly possible that the person who made the copy was acquainted with the Saxon language.' Grundy's belief that the Old English text is flawed will permit him to offer certain amended readings for this text in his search for the waymarks contained in the charter's bounds. In re-visiting the charter and relating it to a walk of the actual landscape this article will attempt to show that the Old English is essentially uncorrupted if we read it aright.

The Form and Structure of the Charter S. 1254

Much comment might be made on the document's internal structure and grammar, but two major points about the actual text need to be noted here. Firstly, the Latin of the document appears in a form curiously different from that of other (and later) Worcester charters. There is no pious invocation and proem, no final anathema nor (the last smooth sentence of reversion apart) any use of formulaic sentiment. The Latin may be thought abrupt and terse; but this does not necessarily mean that the transmission of the bounds is corrupt. Secondly, the Old English bounds as written do not make a complete tour or perambulation returning us as is later careful practice to our starting point, but they run between a 'ford' on the Gloucestershire River Coln to a place described as 'the old dyke at Lec'. As the opening lines of the lease indicate a portion of the land, namely a third part of the whole 15 cassati, is being 'sliced off' – *tertiam partem hoc est quinque cassatos*. While it is possible that the full bounds were later lost to the Worcester records, it may simply be that the details originally recorded were considered sufficient to express the full circuit, and indeed still are.

In the surviving text the bounds are written immediately below King Athelbald's signatory line which ends with an introductory *cum terminus* ('with these bounds') and above Bishop Wilfrid's own subscription with its precise note *sub insertis*. The bounds seem to have been carefully intrinsic to the document, and placed in the middle of it rather than recorded separately. It thus becomes less easy to believe the surviving bounds are both corrupted (as Grundy suggested) and so carefully noted to be present. The Old English of the bounds reads: *of cunuglan sullforda ond long drihtnes dene on leppan crundlas þat on east bleopan ond swa on rawan berh þonne sweres ofer da dene on da alden dic æt lec* – the translation and interpretation of which will be dealt with in the following.

4 Whilst this article was in preparation the majority of Anglo-Saxon charters became available on the internet in an updated compilation by Peter Sawyer (www.esawyer.org.uk) and the documents in the Worcester 'landbok' can now be found listed in their original manuscript order in the individual archives section of the website.

PART II: G.B. GRUNDY'S WORK ON THE BOUNDS

Grundy's work was a major piece of investigation into the bounds of over 50 charters dealing principally with land in Gloucestershire and Worcestershire. Using various pre-20th century sources together with the 6-inch maps of his time and sometimes field-walking, he endeavoured to trace out the boundaries described in the charters. Although hindered by what he sometimes thought to be the errors of copyists, his efforts have proved invaluable to later historians. In his introduction he generously remarks: 'I have been careful not to use the language of certainty in cases in which the probable is only attainable; and in such cases I have left a field for further research on the part of members of the [BGAS] Society who may care to investigate matters on the spot.' When he attempts to plot the bounds in S. 1254 he must, in common with any student of this particular charter, deal with the fact that the perambulation appears incomplete. The '*terminis*' start from the Coln and finish with the '*Lec*'. He suggests that the missing boundaries were known and assumed from other documents – which have not survived.

His commentary and interpretation may be read in full on pp. 40–4 of his work on charters and field names cited earlier. Suffice at this point to indicate that this article agrees with Grundy's starting point and follows him up the initial valley of *drihtnes dene* (although disagreeing with his reading of the Old English) but thereafter diverges significantly in both reading and waymarks.

Here is the first part of Grundy's interpretation, as he numbered the points.

1. *Of cunuglan sulhforda – 'from the ford of the sunk road on the Coln'*

His starting point is 400 m or so north of the small village of Ablington and on the bank of the River Coln at its junction with a smaller valley. (The compound *sulhforda* translates as 'furrow-ford' and Grundy suggests a stream bank 'cut by traffic into a slope').

2. *ond long drihtnes dene on leppan crundlas – 'along Lord's valley to Leppa's Quarries.'*

He takes us up a dry valley NNE-wards but offers no explanation of 'Leppa's Quarries' beyond translating the Old English.

3. *þat on east bleopan – 'Then to the East Shelter? (? Read Hlaew, tumulus)'*

Grundy has here made two emendations to the Old English. He reads the demonstrative pronoun *þat* ('that') as if it is the conjunction *þonne* ('then'), and also alters the scribe's *bleopan* to *hlaew*.⁵ I shall argue that neither emendation to the transmitted text is necessary.

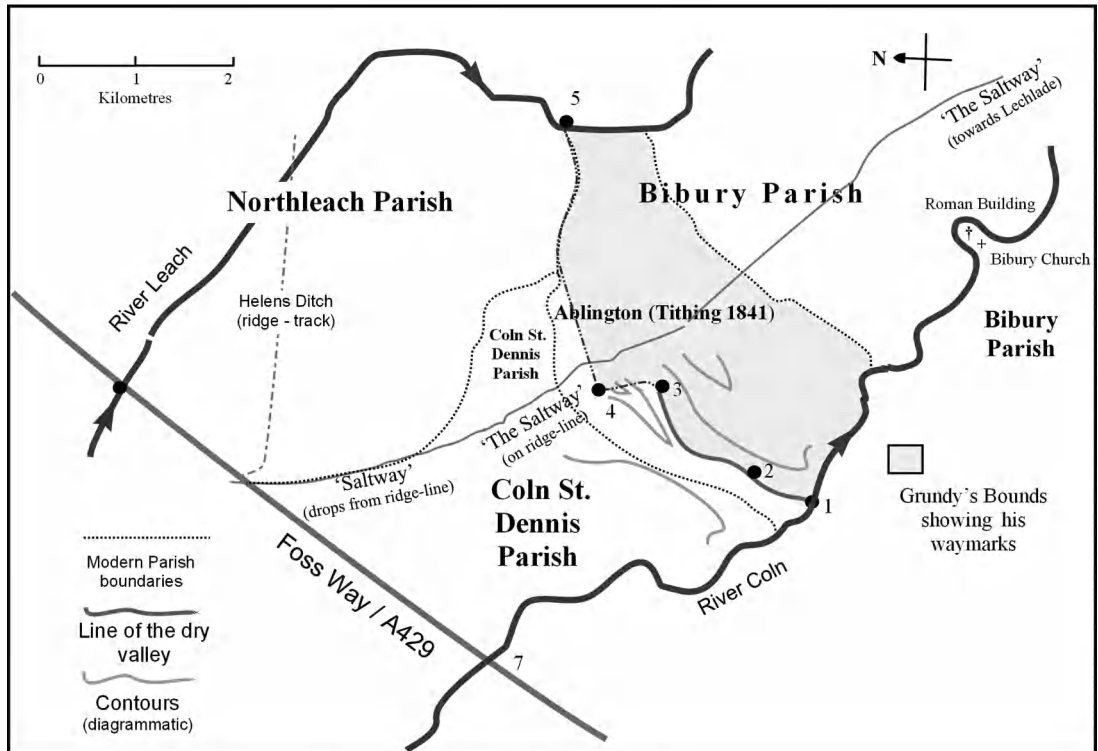
Grundy suggests a reference to the tumulus at Lamborough Bushes (an error for Lamborough Banks). I believe the waymark to be correct, but the truth is not arrived at through his emendations. The curious scribal confusion that produced *leppan crundlas* will be explained later.

We have travelled about 1700 m with Grundy. The diagram Fig. 1 shows his route up the valley north-east wards and subsequent progress almost due east. This eastern route encompasses his emendations for the Old English *rawan* as *rub* (for 'rough' barrow) or even more radically as *Rammebeorb* (Ram-barrow – a diversion onto modern Gembra Hill) then briefly across rising land and so down a gentle slope to a point on the small river Leach just north of Kilkenny Farm.

His solution does not fit the old English bounds and hence his suggestion that a scribe 'ignorant of the language' corrupted them in copying the text. Equally problematic, the solution cannot

5 It may be helpful to recall that in Old English scripts the Roman letter 'p', and the rune-derived forms standing for 'w' and 'th' could all be confused with each other in scribal copying. Even so, Grundy's emendations are not needed.

easily be reconciled with the actual landscape and particularly his unremarkable endpoint. The accompanying diagram (Fig. 1) also shades the area of land which Grundy attributes to the 8th-century lease.



1. *Of Cunuglan sulhforda* -- From the ford of the sunk road on the Coln;
2. *ond long drihtnes dene on Leppan Crundlas*-- along the Lords valley to Leppa's Quarries (Grundy writes:"the site of the quarries is not now apparent.")
3. *þat on east hleopan* -- then to the east tumulus (Grundy reads 'then' for 'that' and 'hlaew' for 'hleopan' and suggests the barrow at Lamborough Banks.)
4. *ond swa on rawan berh* -- so onto Ramm's Barrow (O.S. Gamba Hill)
5. *þonne sweres ofer ða dene -on ða alden dic æt Lec-* then crosswise (obliquely?) over the valley to the Old Dyke at the (river) Leach

Fig. 1. 'An Earl's Lease-Land Revisited' G. B. Grundy's Bounds (1935).

Further Problems with Grundy's Bounds

Grundy choose to amend the Old English text and to relate his solution to a 19th-century tithe map which shows Ablington as part of Bibury parish.⁶ Whilst there is indeed late 9th-century evidence that Ablington was ecclesiastically subordinate to Bibury, to consider a reading of the early 8th-century Old English boundaries against a 19th-century map is not a wholly convincing approach.⁷

From his bounds we get little sense of the whole 8th-century Worcester Abbey estate (including the third cut off for Earl Leppa) lying beside the River Coln. Grundy's bounds cross a watershed and slope gently down to the smaller river Leach – often in summer dry at many points in its upper course. His concept of both the whole 15 cassati and Leppa's five means that the land lies not *juxta* ('beside') the river Coln, but *inter* (or 'between') the two rivers.

Finally, while he suggests plausibly that the missing bounds (i.e. those embracing the entire 15 cassati Bibury holding) were recorded elsewhere, the line he proposes for the bounds recorded in the 'Bibury Charter' S. 1254 is in essence the northern line of the whole Bibury Parish of the 1841 Tithe Award document, embracing both Bibury and Ablington. Grundy's solution purporting to demarcate a northern third is pointless because it is also the northern boundary of the whole estate. When applied to the charter, the result is that no part appears to be cut off the whole Bibury holding. Leppa's leaseland is not in fact defined. To put it another way, Grundy chooses a wholly *external* line of the circuit of the estate as he views it; what is required is a line which is – partly at least – an *internal* line of a Bibury estate, so that a third part can be readily separately delineated and identified. These reservations about Grundy's conclusions invite further study of the problems posed by the Old English part of S. 1254.

Bishop's Commentary

In 1984 Leighton Bishop published an article in The Gloucester Archaeological Society publication, *Glevensis*.⁸ He essentially accepts Grundy's solution, adopting the amended readings of the Old English, and refers to other features of landscape and settlement – headlands, Celtic fields and a small Roman upland site among them. This adds little to our understanding of the landscape features detailed in the 8th century. He shrewdly observes that the river Coln in its valley has shifted, wearing away at the eastern bank, between Winson and Ablington, making doubtful any precise identification of the first point of the Old English survey (the ford on the Coln). There is one minor point in his article which, however, requires detailed mention. Referring to *east bleopan* he writes: 'Dr. Margaret Gelling has suggested that this difficult word may contain the same element as that in Birdlip, meaning a sharp ascent of descent.' This tentative suggestion will help us towards a clearer understanding of one of the early waymarks. As important, it will also provide confirmation that we may trust the Old English as transmitted in our 11th-century copying of the charter. The actual landscape described will be explained later.

6 This tithing map is held at Gloucestershire Records Office under reference GDR/T1/23.

7 Charter S. 1279 of 899 where Ablington pays church-scot and souls-scot to Bibury.

8 L. Bishop, 'The Bibury Saxon Charter' in *Glevensis*, 18 (1984), pp. 16–18.

PART III: 'INTO GLEAPESTRE SCIRE' – THE *LANDBOK* PAGE

Before we turn again to the text of the charter there are important points to be made about the organisation of the whole manuscript in which it is found and three related charters copied up immediately after our S. 1254. This organisation is important because it helps explain why subsequent editors have given S. 1254 the heading 'Bibury.' This heading has directed us away from a true reading of the bounds and now needs to be placed in its proper context.

The first part of the manuscript *Cotton Tiberius xiii*, the *Worcester landbok* introduced earlier, is arranged topographically by county (five of them) and each county begins a new quire or 'gather' of pages. There are three quires detailing lands in Gloucestershire. In its present binding the first Gloucestershire quire is the fourth in the *landbok*. The original scribe copied seven documents into this quire, those found on (pages) ff. 39–44.⁹

It is only the first four of these documents which relate to land around Bibury. Our terse document S. 1254 was written out as the opening text in the first Gloucestershire quire and thus stands as the first of four charters detailing the Abbey's land-holdings around Bibury. There are three leases and a grant of privileges. There is, however, no document testifying to Worcester's holding of Bibury itself.

The four existing charters may be said to comprise and describe an aggregated localised holding, what for present purposes we might call Worcester's 'Bibury estates'. Over the centuries this holding varied in scope, and palpably some parts once held were later lost. But the core of the holding was the unwitnessed Bibury itself – and Worcester indeed held onto this core through the great Domesday Book enquiry and beyond right up to Dissolution of the Abbey.¹⁰

I suggest that '*beagen byrig*' is not intended as the heading solely for our lease, but for all four of these charters together, witnessing a holding centred for administrative purposes on what is later the settlement and church of Bibury.¹¹ The justification for this suggestion lies in the detail of the *landbok* page. On the first line of the early 11th-century text there is the heading '*beagen byrig*' and on the next another heading this time in capitals *INTO GLEAPESTRESCIRE*'. This order is the reverse of the expected, but as becomes apparent over the ensuing four charters the scribe has ordered his material in a deliberate form to make the underlying landholdings more comprehensible. In his mind he had started on his set of four Bibury-related charters, then recalled that he needed the shire heading for the gather of pages. Certainly this organisation was recognised by others, for a later 11th-century scribe added his own summary notes at the page-top above the *beagen byrig* heading. As a result of both scribes' work, this opening page (f. 39r) of the fourth quire of the *landbok* has:

1. added to the upper margin in the *later* 11th-century hand:

a note of the various hideages in each of four holdings beginning with those around *begabirtam* (Bibury).¹²

9 Thomas Hearne's *Chartularius Ecclesiae Wigornensis* (2 vols., Oxford, 1793) preserved the original order of the charters.

10 After Domesday the next major record of Worcester's holdings is the so-called *Red Book of Worcester* (ed. M Hollings, part IV, 1950) compiled around 1299. Christopher's Dyer's article 'Landscape and society at Bibury, Gloucestershire, to 1540' in *BGAS Archives and Local History in Bristol and Gloucestershire* (2007) contains an overview of the later history of land around Bibury.

11 Bibury Church is thought to be of Middle or Late Saxon origin.

12 The Bibury hideages are noted at 'begabirtam... Abolingtune... beorundeslea... etigkote', that is to say, Bibury, Ablington, Barnsley and Eisey. The three other holdings thus summarised are at Withington, Bishop's Cleeve and Westbury.

2. then in the *early* 11th-century hand of our 'Bibury' charter:

- a heading 'beagan byrig';
- a heading 'INTO GLEAPESTRE SCIRE';
- the 'Bibury Charter' of this article, and the opening lines of the next document.

In total the four charters relating to land near Bibury are in manuscript order:

- S. 1254 (A.D. 718–742) – the lease of five cassati to Earl Leppa and Beage from a total estate of 15 cassati;
- S. 206 (A.D. 855) – a grant of privilege from Burgred (King of Mercia) for Ablington, Barnsley Poulton and Eisey;
- S. 1279 (A.D. 899) – a lease of five hides at Ablington for two lives to the priest, Werferth, with the stipulation that church-scot and soul-scot is to be paid to Bibury;
- S. 1262 (A.D. 798–822) a lease to the priest Balthun for Barnsley, adjacent to Bibury.

This foregoing analysis of the *'landbok'* pages invites a fresh look at the bounds of the five cassati of the Earl's lease, free of the assumption that the leased land need be immediately adjacent to Bibury.

PART IV: THE ALTERNATIVE BOUNDS

It is time now to consider the landscape in overview. The river Coln runs roughly north-south and so we might expect the river formed a significant part of the bounds on the east. Knowing that it was ridges as much as water features that separated early land holdings, we might suggest the estate in the early 8th century was a wide strip broadly aligned between the river and the separating ridge rising to the north-east. This ridge line is still followed by the 'Saltway' road and track running down to the Thames at Lechlade which had a Saxon settlement there from around AD 450.¹³

Turning to the Old English text – the incomplete perambulation of the bounds – I do not believe that we have to accept this text is incomplete. It is, in fact, adequate and, in the limited survey terms of the 8th century, sufficient for its purpose. Certainly it allows us today to relate this cut-off third to a greater holding. Furthermore, to complete a perambulation we ought to look for features in the landscape which were (and hopefully still are) sufficiently obvious to direct us back to our starting point, even given a suspected vagueness in the original record of boundaries. We may be more definite and remark that if no clearer bounds were deemed necessary for the lease then our missing section really ought to be a clearly defined line. Any original grant gift possibly had such vaguely defined bounds that the bounds of our charter may not be a crude derivation from them but actually a partial refinement. Crucially, the test of any interpretation of the bounds must be that the 'descriptio' of the text matches significant identifiable physical features in the landscape, and particularly that any doubts are resolved by appeal to the entirety of the solution.

13 The rich cemetery was excavated in 1985 and published by the Oxford Archaeological Unit.

Reasonable Requirements for Alternative Bounds

Before returning to the Saxon text in detail, it is as well to set out some conditions that ought to be fulfilled in a fresh and alternative solution to the question of the Bounds. Any viable alternative interpretation of the charter's bounds ought to be expected to address the following points:

1. The heading is 'beaganbyrig' and our land ought, at some point, be reasonably close to the burg;
2. The whole estate is *juxta fluvium cui nomen est Cunuglae* – so the river ought to form a significant (perhaps the most significant) linear section of the boundary;
3. In considering these bounds, we need to:
 - accept as much of the printed text as possible, without resort to other readings;
 - relate convincingly the original landmarks to the actual landscape;
 - note particularly where in the text extra care is taken to prevent confusion; and,
 - find more promising candidates both for 'rawan berh' than minor barrow features and for the old dyke at Lec than a 'line of ditch or ditches which formed the boundary of the ploughland'.¹⁴
4. Finally, it would be helpful additional evidence if it were possible to demonstrate that the bounds defined an area of land that had a continuing history as a distinct unit beyond Anglo-Saxon times, in the same manner as Grundy's solution.

The Original Language of the Bounds

There is both expectation and internal evidence to suggest that the Bounds may originally have been written in Latin, as is the rest of the charter. This point will be crucial when dealing with what has hitherto been translated into modern English as 'Leppa's Quarries.' Stenton remarks; 'In the early years of the 8th century there are traces of a search for more precise modes of expression. Detailed perambulation begin to appear, particularly in Wessex, set out first in Latin and English'.¹⁵ Both points, that about more careful bounds and that concerning the initial use of Latin, are of relevance.

There is in Worcester charters limited surviving evidence of bounds once written in Latin. However, what evidence there is can be found in early documents where the bounds are expressed in rudimentary fashion as cardinal points of the compass. S. 101 (Batsford AD 727 × 736) and S. 103 (Woodchester AD 716 × 745) are two examples of these Latin bounds. The surviving Worcester material testifies to the order and care in its preservation, and any bounds other than rudimentary ones may as later policy have been translated into the vernacular. Other charters from the West Midlands also bear witness to bounds written in Latin. Of one relating to Adlestrop (S. 1548, containing the bounds of *Tatlestreow*) Grundy himself writes: 'the fact that the descriptive matter is in Latin would suggest that what may be considered the ultimate original was earlier than AD 900'.¹⁶ This is an Evesham Abbey charter.

Of the practice of Latin into Old English translation we have testimony from Asser, writing of Werferth's translation of Gregory's dialogues, where he speaks of 'sometimes rendering sense for sense',¹⁷ while Alfred himself offers a more mixed practice: '*hwilum word be worde hwilum andgit of*

14 Grundy *op. cit.* p. 43.

15 F. Stenton, *The Latin Charters of the Anglo-Saxon Period* (Oxford, 1955), p. 56.

16 Grundy *op. cit.* p. 20.

17 Asser, *Life of King Alfred*; section 77: 'aliquando sensum ex sensu ponens'.

andgiete.¹⁸ That is, seeking sometimes a literal translation and sometimes linguistic equivalence. The Evesham charter cited above suggestively illustrates something of this process. Take the opening sentence: *Ab Hertesbrugge ascendo juxta Bladene usque ad Rabulfes Furlong quae est in camp de Evenlode*. Compare *Ab Hetrtesbrugge* with our charter's initial *Of Cunuglan sulbforda*. We have noted that the Old English *sulbforda* appears a borrowing from the Latin for furrow, *sulcus*.

The Evesham charter exhibits two relative clauses (*quae est in camp de Evenlode* and later *quod est in campo de Daesfort*). I shall read our charter's *pat on east bleopan* similarly. A new waymark is introduced at Evesham by *usque ad* compared with a our varying *ond, on, swa* and *þonne*. In the Worcester text the language is not equivalent, but the principal of signalling each waymark verbally is the same. Finally, in the Evesham document we cross a street with the phrase *et sic transeundo statum illam*. Is this close to the meaning of the difficult *þonne sweres ofer ða dene* (then across over the valley)?² That is to say, the crossing must be completed – here a rendering 'sense for sense'.

So, to the much-quoted 'Leppa's Quarries'. The phrase from Grundy's work enters into *Gloucestershire Place-names* where it is given as an example of names 'containing the names of identified persons or families'.¹⁹ The Old English is undeniably plural, but no one to my knowledge has ever pointed to any qualifying delves in the landscape, nor to any building remains that seem to explain not one but two (or more) quarries up on a down-land area still scarcely inhabited and even now still largely used as grazing. I suggest that the words are a mis-translation of the classical Latin noun *lapicidinae -arum*. It does indeed mean a quarry or, more simply, cut stone. It is a compound word, whose initial part derives from *lapis*, a stone, and whose second part is from *caedo -ere* to cut. The scribe has remembered *leppa* from a few lines above, split the Latin compound and rendered it *leppan crundlas*, or Leppa's Quarries. Why is the Old English plural? Because the Latin noun exists only as a plural, and the scribe knew enough grammar to construe it so and translate accordingly. If he heard a short vowel at the first syllable (Latin *lāpis*) the doubling of the 'p' for the name of Leppa (*Leppan* in the possessive) would have followed naturally. Once we cease looking for a pair or series of quarries, then Grundy's guess that this waymark is the barrow at Lamborough Banks can be confirmed by S. Lyson's report of his excavation there published in 1865.²⁰

Lysons found, 'an elongated oval ... 270 ft by 100 feet by 12 high.' He writes that 'the interior part of the tumulus was built up of loose stones placed in a slanting position converging to the centre like a succession of roofs placed one upon the other. A straight dry wall here and there at intervals intersected this sort of roof at right angles. The whole covered with turf at the northern or principal end'. The size, especially the height, of the barrow Lysons found in the mid-19th century argues that in Saxon times it must have been an impressive feature in the landscape.²¹ Even if parts of it were covered with turf, the whole aspect may have been highly suggestive of quarried stone. As we shall shortly find, the Old English text takes some care to direct us towards it.

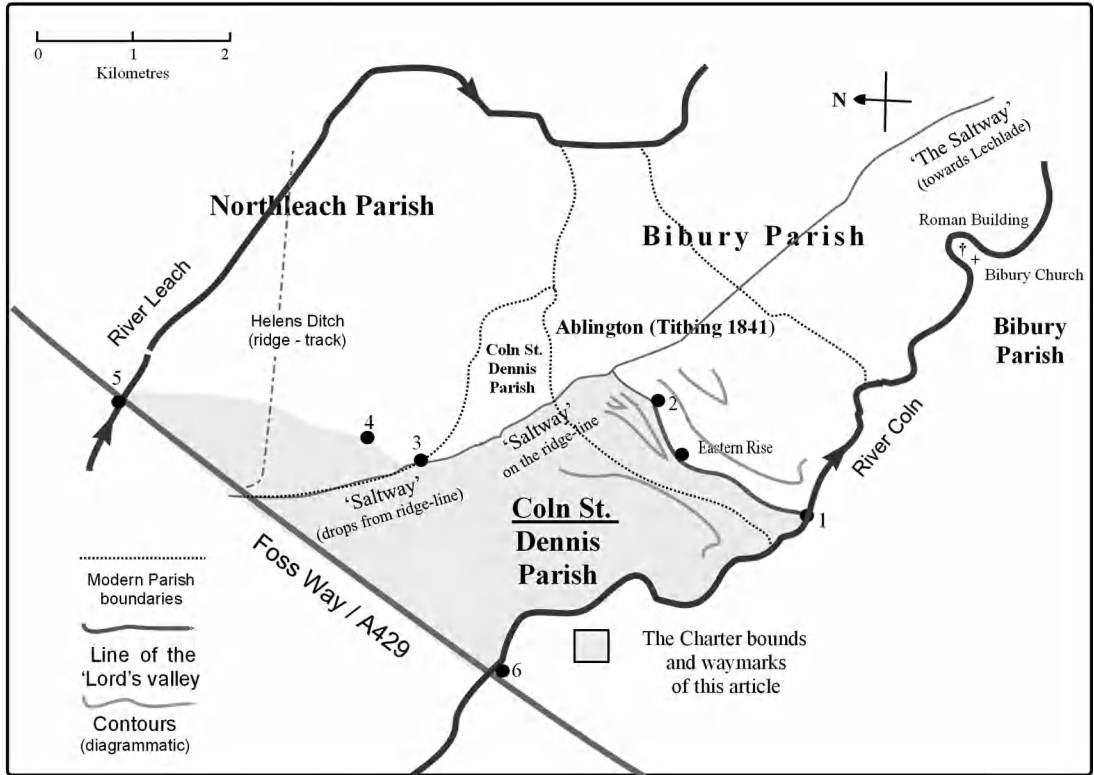
What now follows is the Old English text, together with a gloss and my comments (see also Fig. 2). In addition to the associated diagram in this text, the readers of this and the subsequent sections may refer the OS map Explorer series, 4cm to 1km / 2 ½ inches to the mile, OL45. The starting point (ignoring the swampy woodland beside the River Coln) is at GR SP097083 about 1 km NW of Ablington. On Google Earth find 51.46.23.39 N and 1.51.43.25 W. Follow the dry valley and its footpath northeastwards.

18 In the prefaces to his translation of Gregory's *Pastoral Care* and Boethius.

19 EPNS for Gloucestershire, vol. 4 p. 214.

20 S. Lysons, *Our British Ancestors* (1865), pp. 318–20.

21 Today this barrow (in which Lysons found a single inhumation) is a scatter of stones on a slightly raised mound.



1. *Of Cunuglan sulhforda* -- From the Coln furrowford:
ond long drihtnes dene -- along the ?Lords valley: the choice of valley is confirmed by the next two points;
2. *on leppan crundlas þat on east hleoþan* -- to the rock-pile that is on the eastern rise: the text directs us at the split of the dry valley eastwards up to the barrow at Lamborough Banks;
3. *ond swa on rawan berh* -- reading *rawan berh* as 'row' (i.e long) barrow directs us N.W. (via the ridge line) to the 60 metre long Saltway barrow;
4. *þonne sweres ofer ða dene* -- then over the valley(s): continuing straight we cross over a valley up to the modern Helen's Ditch, a track along high ground above the Leach valley;
5. *on ða alden dic æt Lec* -- (down) onto the old bank at (the river) Leach: the point where Fossway crosses the Leach is a natural reference point, and the Roman road may have needed a bank or causeway as protection from inundation.
6. To complete the perambulation, follow Foss Way to its crossing of the Coln, and so back along the river to *Cunuglan sulhforda*.

Fig. 2. 'An Earl's Lease-Land Revisited' The Bounds of this article.

Bounds: Interpretation and Commentary

Throughout this translation I have assumed the prepositions 'on' and 'ofer' to take the accusative of motion and that the nouns therefore are in that case.

1. *Of cunuglan sulbforda – from the ford of the sunk road on the Coln.* This is Grundy's starting point on the bank of the Coln 1000 metres or so north of the village of Ablington. A small valley meets the river here, and the features found further up the valley will confirm the identification. As Bishop suggested the river has almost certainly moved at this point and there is no trace of the waymark, but a farmer's ford some 100 metres further north indicates the stream remains crossable in the area.
2. *ond long drihtnes dene – along the Lord's Valley.* *The Lord's Valley* is clearly distinguished in the Old English from that of the Coln. Grundy's identification is the only candidate, for nowhere else in the area does such a recognisable valley branch off the river. This flat-bottomed valley runs eastward at right angles to the river. It is a dry valley (as many in the area) in both summer and usually in winter, so there is no named stream. This next phrase corroborates the identification.
3. *on leppan crundlas þat on east bleopan – to the rockpile that is on the eastern rise.* About 1200 metres up the slight slope, the valley divides in equal branches north-east and – rising more steeply – eastward. We need direction here and the Saxon text makes our choice clear. We take the eastern fork up the steepening valley ('the eastern rise').

Grundy, not noting the branching, has unnecessarily complicated his reading with speculation about textual corruption and an *east blawen*. In fact, we may adopt Margaret Gelling's suggestion cited earlier. 'Hleopan' is not such a sharp lip as at Birdlip 16km away, but a slope or rise. (Compare Beowulf line 710: *Da com of more under mist-bleopan* where *mist bleopan* is usually translated as 'mist-slopes'). We have a Mercian *bleopan* or *bleopan*, perhaps cognate with later English 'lip/leap'.

Especially significant about this interpretation of the Old English waymark is that it makes three important points simultaneously:

1. we can feel confident that we are in the correct valley;
2. we are given necessary direction at a point of possible ambiguity in the landscape; and,
3. the clarity of this direction helps confirm the accuracy with which the Old English has been transmitted in the charter document.

We accept the textual direction and climb a further 500 m to the rock-pile (Latin *lapicidinae – arum*) 'that is on the east slope' (or rise). Thus far we have walked with Grundy, but with the greater assurance of understanding *on leppan crundlas* and that this is to be sought *on east bleopan*. We are almost at the watershed between the rivers Coln and Leach. To make clearer sense of the remainder of the Old English text, we break ranks with him and Bishop. We can ignore the small ploughed-out features on the hillside to the North – Gambra Hill of the OS (possibly a surveyor's mis-hearing of Rambury Hill, but not Grundy's *Rammis Berb* emended from *rawan berg*). There is a far better waymark, and it is on the very highest point of the landscape for some kilometres around.

4. *ond swa on rawan berb – and so onto the row barrow.* There is no need to speculate with Grundy that the text is corrupt. *Raw/raew* is an acceptable adjective here. Anglo-Saxon dictionaries and even the Gloucestershire EPNS contain the noun '*raw/raew*' as a row or line and there

is no reason not to let it serve as an adjective.²² *Berh*, for a more usual *beorb*, is acceptable. The adjective-noun form to describe a barrow is commonplace. The waymark in question is Saltway Long Barrow to the northwest and at the highest point of the ridge between the Coln and Leach. It remains the meeting point of five roads and is a parish boundary. At around 60 m in overall length, probably 26 m wide²³ and apparently surviving to over 1.5 m high in the 18th century,²⁴ it might well have justified the adjective *raw/raew* – a ‘row-barrow’ or we would say a ‘long barrow’. Interestingly O’Neill and Grinsell in their survey of charter references to Gloucestershire barrows write that ‘*lang*’ (long) is used only once in describing a barrow and ‘*stan*’ (stone) such as might have applied here or to the Lamborough Banks barrow not at all.²⁵

5. *þonne sweres ofer ða dene – then across over the valley(s)*. The preposition *ofer* can be taken at face value and the feminine *ða dene* may be singular or plural. Looking northwards, we see a slight valley and cross it to arrive at the ridge close by modern Winterwell Barn and meeting at right angles the track known as Helen’s Ditch. From here we drop by a series of small undulations down to the final waymark.
6. *on ða alden dic æt Lec – onto the Old Dyke at the Leach*. We end at a precise point in the landscape. I suggest it is the junction of the River Leach and Roman Fosse Way, where the road dips very sharply to cross the valley. There is also a spring immediately northeast of the place. I am not suggesting that the Old Dyke refers directly to Fosse Way, but that some banking or causeway with culvert would be needed to take the road across the flattish valley of the young Coln’s spring-fed stream.

The small town of Northleach lies just to the southeast. In the *Gloucestershire Placenames* vol. 1 (EPNS) the earliest record of Northleach is ‘Lecce’ (1086). ‘North’ does not appear in Northleach until 1219. The town is not on the Roman road but just east of it. In any case, we can prefer the landscape feature to the settlement. The significant point here is that not only is there this precise point in the landscape but, vitally, it allows us to bring a reading of the bounds full circle back to the *cunuglan sulbforda*.

Remembering that the entire Worcester estate is *juxta Cunuglan*, a completion of the circuit is easy and logical now that we have reached the most distant point from Bibury – this meeting of Fosse Way and the Coln. The charter tells us the whole 15 cassati estate is ‘juxta’ the Coln. Common sense directs us to follow the Fosse Way southwest to where it meets the Coln at Fossebridge some four km south and so continue beside the river back to the *cunuglan sulbforda*.

What the Charter actually contains is just four waymarks, rather as some early charters cited earlier contained cardinal points of the compass: *cunuglan sulbforda* to the south, eastwards to *Leppan crundlas*, then two points on the long northwards leg (the high-point at *rawan berh* and low-point by *ða alden dic*) and so back to the start. If this is correct, then we may suppose that Leppa’s five cassati represent the northern third of the Bishop’s total estate, with the remaining two thirds of *Beaganbyrig*/Bibury lying southwards of it beside the river and including a settlement

22 ‘Rawan berh’ may be intended as a compound word in the accusative, where ‘rawan’ is given a weak ending.

23 The feature was excavated in 1939 by W.F. Grimes for the Ministry of Works and his report published in *Archaeological Reports*, iii – 1960, pp. 5–40. He recorded the length as 185 feet and the original width as probably 85 feet.

24 In H. O’Neill and L.V. Grinsell, ‘Gloucestershire Barrows’, *Trans. BGAS*, 79, pt.1 (1960), pp. 41 seq. They wrote of ‘5 feet’.

25 O’Neill and Grinsell, *op. cit.*

at Bibury (perhaps beside the site of the Roman villa). We should not necessarily expect that the leased portion was an exact third – particularly if a *cassati* was not so much a defined land area as an *ad hoc* unit of assessment for military service or food rent.

The whole of Worcester's Bibury estate as we now understand it may reasonably be described as *juxta* the Coln. Its western boundary is the river; its eastern boundary may have followed ancient features in the landscape (ridge-line and long barrow); and its northern point is the river Leach at the Roman road – all natural landmarks. South of the settlement we might wonder if the estate boundary descended again to the river around Coln St Aldwyn.

Problems and Resolutions

There are difficulties with this reading of the bounds, though less so than with Grundy's. The area of land picked out moves away from later known Worcester holdings. It appears contiguous with these only on the southern edge on the downs above Bibury itself. Indeed there is (perhaps) nothing else in the record to associate Worcester with this more northerly area. More specifically, in other charters a *dic* means a bank not a path of any kind and where a road or track is included as part of a boundary this road or track is identified (and is usually still identifiable). To associate *þa alden dic* with a bank or causeway protecting Roman Fosse Way, however essential such a feature may have been, is tendentious.²⁶ These difficulties are counter-balanced with positives. When we turn to the 'reasonable requirements for alternative bounds' of an earlier section of the article, these have been met.

1. The southern limit of Earl Leppa's holding is within three kilometres of Bibury, and the charter does indicate the lease-land is a portion discernibly cut off from the larger holding. We need not expect it to be any closer than this.
2. Our new bounds are indeed *juxta Cunuglae*, and for a larger portion than Grundy's suggested bounds.
3. We can read the Old English of the charter exactly as written without recourse to speculative emendations. The *east blopan* is found precisely where direction is required in the actual landscape in order to find *leppan crundas*. The size of *rawan burh* must have made it a very distinctive feature, really a 'row' or long barrow. *Sweres ofer þa dene* makes sense as 'across over the valley' immediately beyond Saltway Barrow and *up again* to the ridge where Helen's Ditch track runs. The *alden dyke* at Lec is precise and helpful.
4. We are able to complete a perambulation very logically along two major features.
5. Intriguingly, the land area identified does indeed have a continuing history – and a curious one. It becomes the Parish of Coln St Dennis, and deserves a section to itself.

The Parish of Coln St. Dennis

A comment is needed on the sequence of research for this article. The principal 'waymarks' of the Old English text (Lamborough Banks, Saltway Barrow and the Fosse Way near Northleach) were identified in the first stages of work on the charter. Only later did I turn to Domesday Book to examine the history of the landscape, and discover there that the bounds here proposed for the charter matched closely a subsequently surviving land area. This process appears the reverse of

26 It is also conceivable that *ða alden dic* refers to the ridge-line track known as Helen's Ditch (see again Fig. 2). It is a walk of 200–300 metres westward to meet Fosse Way and the completion of the perambulation. I have found no record of a history, investigation or dating of Helen's Ditch.

Grundy's (who seems to have begun from his 1841 Tithe Map of the landscape and then fitted in his waymarks) and it may be the more valid for that.

The parcel of land described above is an elongated diamond some 7 km in length and 2 km at its widest point. The southern tip, the Coln and up the 'Lord's Valley', is just under 1 km NW of Ablington. The northern tip is the junction of Fosse Way (now the A429) with the river Leach just west of Northleach.

The land described in Leppa's lease is very nearly that of the later civil parish of Coln St. Dennis. A glance at the map of Hundreds and Parishes in the *EPNS Gloucestershire* volume IV or the entry in the *Victoria County History* vol. VII for Gloucestershire or careful examination of the OS maps will confirm this. There has been a nip-and-tuck here and there (Northleach Parish has taken in the Foss Way down to its junction with the Salt Way, but there is compensation in the inclusion of Calcot Peak Barn). Thus the *area* of land occupied by the later parochial parish remains very close to the area of Earl Leppa's lease as I have described it.

The Domesday Book entry containing Coln/Calcot is also instructive. The size is five hides (which ought be our five cassati – such equivalence is confirmed in numerous Gloucestershire DB entries). The entry reads: '*Colne et Caldecot v hid*'. In Domesday this land was a detached part of the Hundred of Deerhurst (noted as 'DERHERST') but the owner in 1086 was the Abbey of St. Denis, Paris.

There is no surviving record stating that Coln St Dennis ever belonged to Worcester, but the parish is contiguous to the well-attested Worcester holding of Bibury. It may have gone to Deerhurst as part of a process of endowments or exchanges or have been lost to Worcester later in the tumult of Aethelred's reign or the early years of Cnut. From Deerhurst, it in turn somehow transferred to Westminster and thence to St. Denis. As a parcel of land, it seems to have been a conveniently movable morsel.

Author's Note:

Some questions remain. The lease document is generally judged to be reasonably authentic, and we might consider what the proposed new bounds add to a continuing discussion of its reliability. A lease is a temporary document. This particular lease must surely have expired before the end of the 8th century on the death of Beage, and we might wonder why it was even copied up into the 'Landbok' in the early 11th century. There may be further scope for comment about Worcester's ownership of the 'Bibury estate' lands in Anglo-Saxon times, as witnessed in the fuller set of the four Bibury-related charters. Finally, the question may be raised regarding the purpose of this lease of land to Earl Leppa apparently so far from Bibury and its church.